

**Manolete Mora, *Myth, Mimesis and Magic in the Music of the T'boli, Philippines*.
Manila: Ateneo Press, 2005. ISBN 971-550-493-0 (paperback) \$31.00.**

This rich and engaging ethnographic study of the musical tradition of the T'boli people from the highlands of southwestern Mindanao, Philippines, is based on the author's extensive fieldwork experience over a number of years in the Lake Sebu region. It won the Government of the Philippines National Book Awards for Folklore in 2005 and was a finalist in the Gintong Aklat Awards 2006 for Social Science. Essentially it is a compelling exploration of the place and potency of myth, poetics, and magic in the musical and spiritual lives of this small-scale upland community. Central to this exploration is the repeated observation that musical mimesis is, for the T'boli, an intrinsic part of the cultural process of interpreting, articulating, making, and remaking the world. This publication complements an audio CD released some time ago, *Utom, Summoning the Spirit: Music in the T'boli Heartland* (Rykodisc 1997).

In T'boli musical practice, the cultural tool which facilitates the audible mimesis of the world is *utom*. Utom is essentially a complex musical and aesthetic system of instrumental music that connects musical organization and meaning with outside referents such as specific objects like a bird, or moral conventions and practices such as gender relations or ritual murder. Mora details a series of examples to show how utom acts not only as an artistic means for representing the subtle complexities of the world, but also as a way of entering into a relationship with that world. This connection is richly noted through a series of analogies between musical experience and the physiology of the body (p.107), and also the movement of horses and the custodians of the spirit world. Mora offers the suggestion that the intimate musical representation of extra musical phenomenon creates potent links to a moral universe, one that is intrinsically grounded in reciprocity.

The first two chapters of the book (Encounters with the T'boli/ Myth, Mimesis and Nature) outline the mythical, cultural, and historical landscape of the community and describe the primary sensibilities that frame T'boli codes of gender, moral conduct, and authority. Drawing on the words of adept musicians, Mora shows how an understanding of the power and place of music in the society is closely connected with knowledge of magic and the actions of the spirit world. The range of indigenous instruments that are used by the T'boli to play utom are described in terms of a local system of classification in which gender and cultural function become primary organising principles.

The third and fourth chapters (Ritual Magic in the Vocation of the Musical Adept/ The Poetics of Utom) focuses on the experiences of adept musicians and recollections of how a musician is made in T'boli culture, and the realizations that may be attained in the process. Never far from this discussion is the presence of the spirit world and how, through a range of obligations and expectations, the musicians go about building an intimate relationship with these guides.

If during the evening the spirit touches the edge of my zither it will sound beautiful ...
but if he is not with me it is difficult to even pluck the strings. He who visits me is the
custodian of the utom I play (p. 101).

This wide ranging discussion about musical sensibilities and meaning sets up the framework for the following discussion in which utom is explored as a musical and aesthetic concept. Here the formal structure and performance practice of some selected utom performances are analyzed, and then discussed, in terms of how they relate specifically to the extramusical referent they invoke. The performance of utom involves both an inventory of musical ingredients (the mode and its variants) and a method for 'cooking' those ingredients, this latter process involving a significant amount of improvisation.

The last two chapters (Ethics of Utom/Postscript) are concerned with how the community deals with regional, national, and globalized pressures and the experiences they face coming to terms with rapid industrialization and modernization in their mountainous homeland. Mora shows that T'boli musicians have been quick to copy the increasing din of mechanical sounds of rice mills and outboard motors into their performances of utom. He shows that it through this mimesis these modern phenomena are then transposed into the T'boli moral universe of reciprocity and coded relationships. It is through such an act that these introduced phenomena acquire local meaning and strategies for their engagement can be formulated.

Overall, this study engages with a wide range of ethnographic materials and issues that will be of interest to ethnomusicologists, anthropologists, and those interested in Southeast Asian folklore and cross-cultural aesthetics. Further, the discussion of T'boli aesthetics and cultural meanings invites comparisons with studies by Feld (1990) and Roseman (1991). Moreover, the discussion of utom also

provides another take on a modal system and its improvisatory practices that is complementary to broad discussions of other modal systems, such as ragas and maqams. For the most part, the book is very clearly written and avoids unnecessary jargon, although some readers might find the dense analysis sections are a bit tougher going than perhaps should be the case. However, what is refreshing here is that Mora strikes a convincing balance between ethnomusicological scholarship and an ethnographic methodology that seeks to give an unmediated voice to the concerns and experiences of local adept musicians. In doing so, he avoids imposing an outside theoretical construct or attempting to divine one from the ethnographic material. There is a richness in this bottom-up perspective that is in some ways reminiscent of Feld's study of the Kaluli and the sensuous ethnographic methodology of Stoller (1997).

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